

Migration of the Romanian population from rural areas during the pandemic

Juliana Nicolae

Doctoral School Economics II, University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Email: istratoiui@yahoo.com

Abstract. Work presents the important role and necessity of statistical data in the analysis of socio-demographic factors on society. A socio-demographic phenomenon that has seen a remarkable and controversial development in recent decades is the migration of the internal and international population. This phenomenon, over the years, has caused distortions in the amount and structure of the population in Romania, influencing all major demographic processes and impacting the level and pace of development of the national economy in general and the labor market, in particular. Romania has the highest poverty rate in the European Union, with a rural environment that remains below the level of economic and social development. Internal migration is one of the most important demographic processes leading to changes in the population structure. The results show that an important role in internal migration flows from rural to urban are the population between 15 and 50 years and the working age population. Population growth in these cities is mainly due to internal migration, as internal migrants are mainly attracted to large cities. In Romania, the employment rate is increasing amid changes in the age structure that reflect the decline and aging of the population, but the labor force is decreasing and the labor market is shrinking.

Keywords: *internal migration, rural-urban migration, rural population, rural environment, territorial movement, rural-rural migration*

Introduction

In 2020, Romania's rural population grew for the first time in 14 years. Work from anywhere and social distancing have caused the population to move to quieter suburbs and towns around major cities, having a significant impact on the housing market.

Thus, a growing number of Romanians are opting for more affordable and spacious homes away from urban agglomerations, a trend that is expected to continue in the medium term, offering new perspectives to housing developers.

Romania's rural population, which increased by 28,000 in 2020, is modest, but it is the first since 2007, and it must also be taken into account that the rural population has decreased on average by around 50,000 annually. In addition, Romania's urban population decreased by 170,000 inhabitants in 2020, compared to an average decrease of about 50,000 inhabitants per year between 2010 and 2020. Romanians chose to move from cities to the countryside, also helped by the effects of the pandemic, enforcing social distancing and supporting remote work.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS 2016), approximately 107,000 Romanians moved from cities to villages in 2015, but less than 78,000 moved from villages to cities.

Instead, in 1990, a quarter of Romanians left the city for the countryside, and rural-to-urban migration was seven times higher.

Looking at the demographics of the two residential areas, workers migrate abroad from rural areas mainly for economic reasons, and domestic planning has reduced the likelihood of migration from rural areas to urban areas.

Migrated rural people preferred to maximize their opportunities by leaving the country, rather than moving to cities in Romania.

On the other hand, urban to rural migration occurs mainly for two reasons. The first reason, which applies to all age groups, is the development of residential environments close to cities, i.e. residential areas that are not administrative districts. Although urban, they all have an urban character.

The second reason is the urban to rural migration of retirees who prefer to retire in rural areas where they can enjoy an economically advantageous lifestyle commensurate with their income. Urban retirees go to the countryside because the cost of living is cheaper and more comfortable.

On the other hand, many city dwellers build summer cottages and holiday homes in the countryside. This has had an impact on increasing the employment rate in rural areas. Because builders usually pay someone to look after their houses while they are away.

Also, in many cases, small businesses and subsistence farms were developed alongside rural homes built by urban workers are expanding rapidly, and many prefer to settle in the suburbs.

Approaching the theme in specialized literature

Migration is, in fact, the movement of the population in space with a change of the usual place of residence (Oucho, 1993).

Romania's internal migration is low compared to other countries: Romanians have a low internal migration, so the economic impact of this type of migration on the labor market is still small.

People can now look for ways to work and live in the cheapest way possible. With the opportunity to get a job in the city, many people prefer commuting as a profitable way to maximize their income.

Internal migration is a demographic process that influences the number, age structure and gender distribution of the population at the level of regions and localities (Etzo, 2008). Internal migratory movements are conditioned by factors of attraction and rejection, influencing the labor market, human capital and economic potential in the localities of origin and destination (Piras, 2016).

As defined by the International Organization for Migration, 2015, migration is the movement of individuals or groups across national borders or within the same country. It is population migration that includes the movement of all types of people, regardless of distance, composition of immigrant groups, and causes. This includes the movement of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and those moving for other reasons, even when talking about family reunification.

International migration is a complex and multicriteria phenomenon that can have different meanings, coverages and methods of estimating different data, depending on the level of knowledge and the objectives of the research pursued. For this reason, the scale of the phenomenon was often described differently in the mass media than in official Romanian statistics. Based on these assumptions, it should be noted that some terms also circulate in different environments regarding people living abroad, for example: diaspora which does not fall within the statistical significance for measuring international migration.

According to the European Parliament, on January 1, 2019, 13.3 million people living in the 27 EU countries were citizens of other EU member states.

Data and results

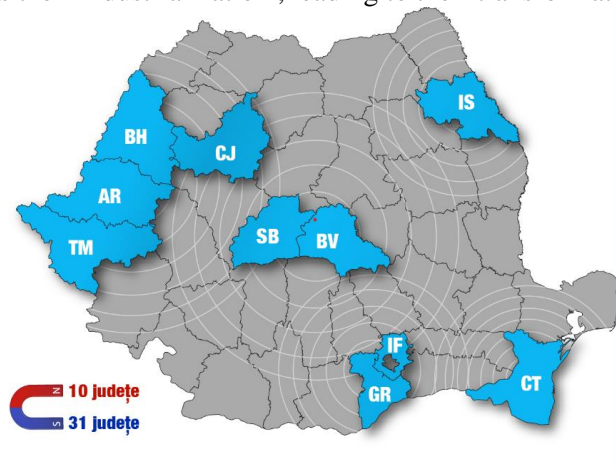
In 2015, a very large number of people applied for asylum in the EU, so the European Parliament imposed a series of measures and reforms to guarantee border security and their distribution fairly between EU countries. Migration is influenced by a number of factors such as drive, attraction, security, demographics, human rights, climate change. Another important factor is war, conflict, state persecution or the high risk thereof. There have been major changes in the country's demographics in recent years,

which have affected population migration. In addition, population growth/decrease, aging (25.8% elderly in rural versus 17.9% in urban) influence the economic growth of the destination countries.

The population of Romania, compared to the countries of Northern and Western Europe, is to a small extent involved in internal migration, the main destinations being rural-urban towards economically developed localities. In 2016, a record was set in our country for the largest internal migration since 1991. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS, 2016), 389,000 people changed their place of residence from one area of Romania to another.

According to World Bank data, approximately 46% of Romania's population lives in rural areas, close to the global average of 46.1%.

Romania, a European state, is known as a poorly developed country from an economic point of view, with a dominant agricultural economy. Over the years it was found that more than 70% of the population lived in rural areas, 4-5 times more than in Western European countries and 2-3 times more than in former communist countries. At the level of rural areas, there is a demographic growth at the same time as their industrialization, leading to their transformation (rural localities) into cities.



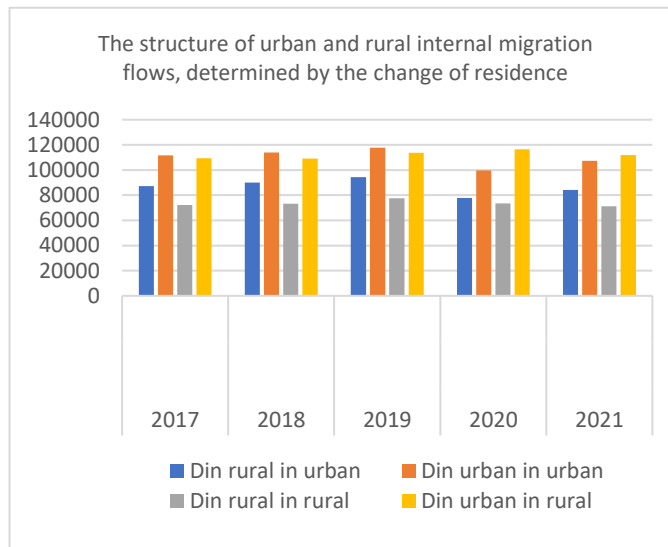
Source: <https://pressone.ro>

Between the years 1968-2004, the evolution of internal migration flows knows four migration directions with distinct evolution trajectories:

- rural-urban migration peaked in the early 1980s, followed by a dramatic decline
- rural-to-rural migration fell sharply in the early 1980s and has been on a slight upward trend since then;
- urban-rural migration increased very rapidly (6-fold) in the early 1980s, followed by a sharp decline in 1989 and a slight increase from 1996 onwards, but is no longer reached.
- migration from city to city is increasing, but not so spectacularly.

Traditionally, urban-rural migration has occurred in wealthy and well-developed communes and villages in peri-urban areas, near large cities.

In the 80s, the flow of population migration from the village to the city was strictly controlled. In his work, conf. univ. dr. Zotic Vasile, states that the phenomenon of rural-urban migration began in the 1950s and 1960s and massive industrialization, which reached its peak in the 1970s, increased the attractiveness of university centers with economic functions: Bucharest, Iași, Cluj, Timișoara, Constanța, Galati, Brașov, Ploiesti, Constanta, etc. The third major migration flow before 1989 was the "Moldovenization" of some industrial areas (especially Brașov) and especially the Jiu Valley.



Source: INS, Tempo Online

Territorial or geographic movement of population means movement. This means movement, change of location and residence, i.e. the movement and return of people in a certain space, either seasonally or permanently separated, or moving individually or in groups on a daily basis (Ilinca, 1999).

Immigration can be temporary (one month or more) or permanent (one year or more), external (international) and internal (domestic). Although, migration is a proper territorial movement of the population for different purposes and periods, it is difficult to delimit. As territorial mobility takes different forms, depending on the type of existing location, such as: inter-rural, inter-urban and inter-urban-rural, it occurs in two directions: arrival and departure.

Thus, several flows appeared: from rural to urban, from rural to rural, from urban to rural and from urban to urban. From the analysis of the data provided by the INS regarding the flows, it can be seen that 1990 is the year in which most people leave their homes in the countryside, moving to the big cities.

After 1990, rural-urban flows declined and became less dominant, but remained superior to urban-rural flows until 1997, when the two flows reversed, increasing and decreasing. There are bearish ranges, but there is an upward trend. Changes in internal migration flows began in 1997. This year, for the first time, the urban-to-rural migration of Romanians exceeded the rural-to-urban migration. They do not show large fluctuations and remain constant. We can observe that mainly young people leave the rural environment, and the number of elderly people who leave the urban environment is twice as high as in the rural environment. For comparison, in 1990 approximately 550,000 Romanians moved from the countryside to the city, but less than 28,000 inhabitants moved from the city to the countryside. Although they leave the country to find work in the city, the city population prefers to retire to the country at the end of their working life.

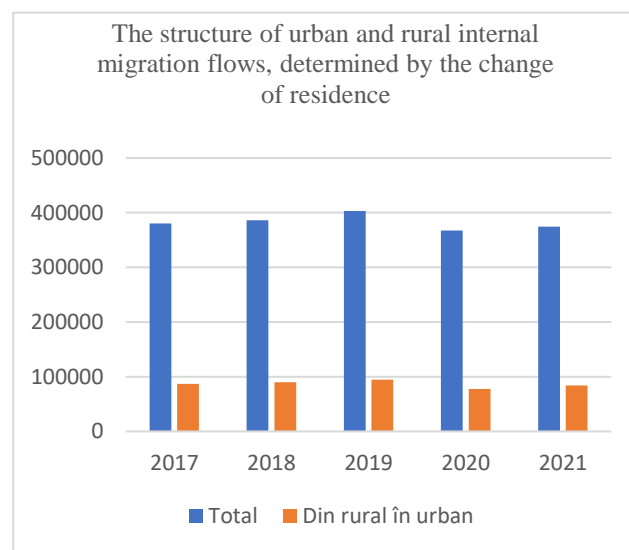
In the period of 2020-2021, the period of the pandemic, an increasing trend was observed, that is, the number of people moving (changing their place of residence) from the city to the countryside. More than 115,000 Romanians moved from urban to rural areas, some because they could no longer find themselves in the urban environment losing their jobs, others wanted to work away from the noise and pollution of large urban agglomerations.

The highest migratory rates were determined by young people, being the most dynamic age group, who hold the most important shares even in moments of crisis in the evolution of internal migration. Among young people, the minimum migration occurred in 1989, and today, although the values of the 70s have not been reached, there is a significant return on the migration rate.

Internal migration of the rural population represents the inflow and outflow of people from the rural environment unaffected by external changes and movements of the urban population.

As can be seen, the intensity of internal migration of the rural population peaked in 2019 and decreased significantly in the following year.

In terms of internal migration, the main direction in 2017-2019 was rural-to-urban migration. As of 2019, the number of people moving from rural areas (villages) to urban centers (urban areas) has started to decrease, with people moving in the opposite direction (urban to rural areas) mostly due to economic migration and less jobs. mobility opportunities in the city. As of 2020, urban-rural migration has exceeded rural-urban migration. This is only partially due to the pandemic and suburbanization phenomenon .



The evolution of the population from rural to urban in Romania, 2017-2021
Source: author based on INS data (2023)

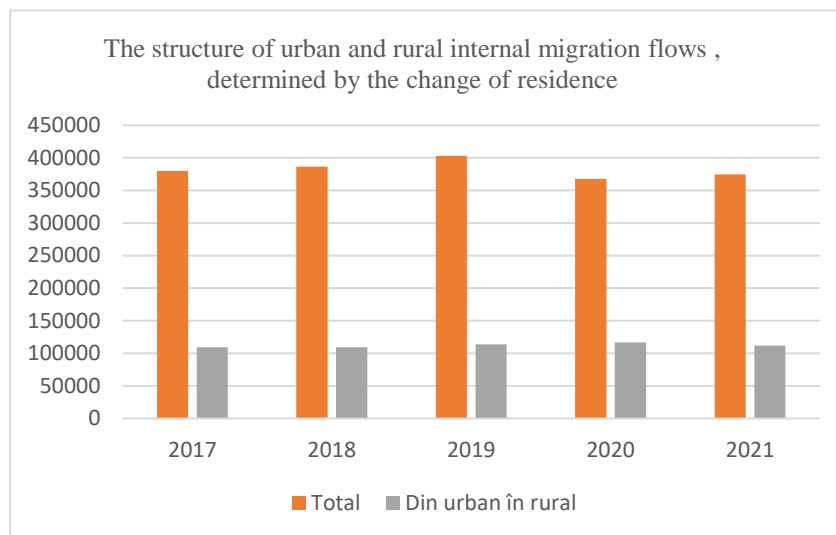
This increase in migration from the city to the countryside in the context of the pandemic shows that people with better material circumstances have left the country for fear of infection.

Alternatively, comparing the INS data with a study released last year of a very large sample of 10,000 to 15,000 urban residents, funded by the World Bank, suggests that most of them are in urban to rural areas. Secluded in a region with clean natural environment and less pollution.

Due to economic restructuring, especially in industry, a growing number of people will reorient themselves to the countryside. Using the land fund law in 1991, some landowners preferred to live in rural areas where they had secure means of subsistence in the short and medium term. It can be seen that these values are relatively modest, as is the rate of total internal migration: urban and rural, the number of people in the urban population remaining higher than the rural population in this time interval. During this period, the urban population exceeded the rural population, and the share of the rural population in the total population of Romania is decreasing, the lowest level is recorded in 2020.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, *the structure of internal urban and rural migration flows, determined by the change of residence* , defines arrive with domicile - Persons who live in a certain area for a certain period of time (does not include change of residence in the same city or sector, nor change of residence from one village to another within the same municipality) and leave with domicile - One person who moved from one place of residence to another within a certain period of time.

The village has been and will remain the place from which one leaves or enters, a major factor in internal migration processes. Following the analyzes carried out, it was found that the weights in the evolution of migration have a constant decrease in the involvement of the village, because they have reduced departures from the village to the city, but also from the countryside to the countryside. There is also a swing through increasing urban-to-rural migration, maintaining the increasing involvement of the village in internal migration.



The evolution from urban to rural in Romania, 2017-2021

Source: author based on INS data (2023)

The phenomena of emigration and internal migration have influenced Romania's regions (North-East, South-East and South) through a net loss of population due to migration, which means that their power of attraction is reduced for those who come or return to the village. All these regions are characterized by high employment in the agricultural sector, high poverty, with an aging population, low infrastructure, with a GDP per capita below the national average, i.e. 50-60%.

In Oltenia (South-East) and Moldova (North-East) in the countryside there are more entries than exits only for adults and the elderly, and less for young people. The departure of young people from the countryside contributes to the decrease of human capital able to lead to the perpetuation and development of the rural community. The share of arrivals of the population over 35 is significantly higher than the share of departures.

The major cause of the aging population in rural areas is migration, thus generating an acute labor shortage. In rural areas, the vulnerability of social categories is observed, such as: children, women and the elderly, because at least one parent is employed abroad, most children are left in the care of grandparents. Although this aspect has negative consequences, at the level of Romania there is a considerable volume of remittances. Thus, Romanians who have left regularly send money to their families back home. Positive effects of population movements are also observed, which consists in bringing back to the community social and human capital by those who have migrated, skills, knowledge, entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, attitudes and intercultural connections with other cultures. In rural localities near large cities with a consolidated economy and in localities with high tourist potential (mountain communities), the phenomenon of return of those who have sufficient financial reserves to live in conditions closer to nature or from the desire to invest in a rural economic project.

According to the studies, it is observed that migration can also consist of seasonal expatriates. An important contribution is also made by the local authorities who get involved in the rural communities, being attracted by large investments that are made in the economic structures of the village.

Conclusions

In the current village, population migration is the result of chaotic and spontaneous evolution, the non-involvement of the state in the economy and social life of the rural environment. Other causes affecting the phenomenon of rural migration are urban overpopulation, land shortage and the economic means for housing in cities. The population over 40, the most vulnerable on the urban labor market, decides to go to the countryside to start a paid job. The active young population is moving to urban areas, migrating to urban centers for a more attractive life, but also for a much better job.

In the next 20 years, the trend of migration from cities to villages will intensify. This is because it attracts more ecological and natural comfort from the villages at the expense of metropolitan areas that bring more noise, more stress and more pollution. At the same time, both in cities and especially in villages, there is a tendency to focus on minimal organics.

Internal population migration is a phenomenon in permanent movement. In recent years, due to the economic crisis and the high rate of unemployment, the phenomenon of migration to the urban environment has slowed down, although there are municipalities that are revitalizing, and others are continuously depopulating.

The phenomenon of internal migration remains quite important for Romania, because almost 80% of Romania's territory is represented by rural areas, where most of the resources are found and where approximately half of the population lives and works. The development of the rural environment is an objective that will influence the change in the direction of migration.

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